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NATIONAL MONUMENTS

Utah official recants saying Zinke vowed to undo Bears Ears

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

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Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke (center) and San Juan County Commission Chairman Phil Lyman (hand raised) overlook the Butler Wash Indian Ruins in Bears Ears National Monument earlier this month.

Photo by Francisco Kjolseth, courtesy of AP Images.

A local Utah official, who told E&E News last week that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke privately vowed to recommend rescinding Bears Ears National Monument, said today that he misspoke and that Zinke had not promised any specific outcomes for the 1.35-million-acre site.

San Juan County Commission Chairman Phil Lyman, who met with Zinke earlier this month both in Washington and during the secretary's visit to the Utah monument, recounted those meetings in an interview with E&E News last week.

He recalled Zinke stating that "not only should that monument be rescinded, but we're not going to stop there," vowing to also review public lands management ([Greenwire](#), May 19).

In an email to E&E News today, Lyman said he had misspoken in a recollection of his Washington meeting with Zinke and other San Juan County officials.

"What I recall him saying was 'not only are we going to address the monument, we are not stopping there,'" Lyman wrote.

He pointed to President Trump's own criticism of Bears Ears during his signing of the executive order in late April mandating a review of national monuments, when the president was joined by critics of the monument including Utah Sens. Orrin Hatch (R) and Mike Lee

(R) and Utah Gov. Gary Herbert (R). Trump had stated: "This should never have happened."

Lyman concluded: "I did not intend to put words [in] Secretary Zinke's mouth about a foregone decision. He was very clear that his role was to provide a recommendation."

In a Friday statement, an Interior Department spokesman had denied Zinke had made such remarks and said he had yet to come to a determination.

"The Secretary is listening to and talking with advocates on all sides of the issue in Utah," spokeswoman Heather Swift said at the time. "He has not yet reached a decision. He encourages advocates on all sides of the issue to log on to [regulations.gov](#) or mail their comments to the Department."

Trump issued an executive order in late April mandating a review of all national monuments created since 1996 that include more than 100,000 acres and directing the Interior Department to recommend boundary changes or full rescissions, as well as changes to management plans if necessary.

The directive takes particular aim at two sites in Utah, the Bears Ears monument created by President Obama during his final weeks in office and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument created by President Clinton in 1996.

Zinke, who visited both sites earlier this month, must submit an interim report on his recommendations for any alterations to the Bears Ears monument by June 10, with a final report due on all sites under review by late August.

Guard station fire

The Bureau of Land Management is investigating a suspicious fire that damaged a guard station in the Bears Ears monument, *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported yesterday.

The building was damaged sometime before Zinke visited the state in early May, the newspaper reported, but BLM has yet to release details about the incident while it is under investigation.

The structure, which is used by scientists and BLM staff during field work, is located at Sweet Alice Spring on Elk Ridge.

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